

Watchwords by Officer Tom Hanshaw
November 4, 2011

I thought I'd switch gears a bit with this week's column to follow up on a suggestion I had a few weeks back. AES teacher Bruce McBrien, sent me an e-mail concerning pet passengers in motor vehicles. Bruce related he had noticed an increase in "K-9 co-pilots" when driving around town. We've all seen this and some of us have probably been guilty as well. I'm talking about the driver with their dog on their lap, leaning out the driver's side window or even sharing the duties with the steering wheel. While this certainly constitutes the motor vehicle offense of impeded operation, what's worse, it's actually quite dangerous for the dog. If the vehicle was ever involved in a crash, there is a strong likelihood their pet could be seriously injured.

Air bags and young people do not mix, that's why we suggest children sit in the back seat. Air bags and dogs do not mix either. Very few pet owners use a safety restraint for their dogs, which means there is nothing to hold them into the seat in a crash. In a crash, especially a serious one, once the car stops moving, anything unrestrained inside will keep moving until something stops them. Sadly, an unrestrained pet will continue moving until striking the windshield, dashboard or even being ejected. Dogs should be treated just as any other passenger and restrained with a proper device.

Thanks to the ASPCA, here are a few tips for pet owners to keep in mind and keep their pet safe. No matter how long the trip, precautions should always be taken to keep your special passenger safe.

- Use a crate or carrier, that's comfortable and well-ventilated
- If you're planning a long trip, be sure your pet is prepared, try a few short trips first
- Never leave the pet alone in the car, especially on hot or sunny days
- Carry a pet kit for the car, with plastic bags, toys, a pillow and food
- Keep your pet inside, don't allow him to ride with his head out the window
- Be sure the dog is wearing a tag with contact information and up to date on shots
- Bring your own water, it's safer than drinking from an unknown source

Pets are great companions and often considered family members by their owners. Don't risk an injury to man's best friend by leaving them unprotected in the car. It may be entertaining to have your dog help you drive but it's illegal and quite dangerous. I should also mention that dogs riding in the bed of a pick-up truck must be restrained when the truck is moving.

Believe it or not, we are quickly approaching the dreaded winter season. Although the official start of the season isn't until December 22nd, the winter parking ban begins on December 1st. Residents of the Central Business District should visit the Clerk's Office at Town Hall as soon as possible to obtain a parking permit. The free sticker allows residents of the downtown area to park overnight in the Water Street or Friend Street parking lots. Additional information will be published soon through the media and on the Amesbury Town web site.